



Attitudes, ideology and awareness

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ATTITUDES, IDEOLOGY AND AWARENESS

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1. Social evaluation of variation in a *change* perspective

Text genres that introduce or overview sociolinguistics as a discipline (historical accounts, introductory books, handbooks), normally group attitudes and ideology with the *applications* (language planning, politics, education, etc.), or with the type of topics (language contact, choice, multilingualism, etc.) that characterizes the *sociology of language* tradition. Against this backdrop, the present handbook's inclusion of a language attitudes chapter in its "Language Variation and Change" section is noteworthy.

Theories that aim to explain language change processes operate with a number of "factors" that make up these processes. There is little disagreement about what to put in the total pool of factors, but views differ as to how the different factors interrelate and function. The fundamental question is which factor(s) we should conceive of as the *driving force*, and which ones we should consider as *conditions*. The factors may be differently grouped in theoretical frameworks, but in general such different groupings do not reflect the theory's answer to the driving-force versus conditions question. If a theory operates with the common distinction between internal and external factors, *internal factors* will typically refer to possibilities and constraints in terms of fundamental speaker/hearer-based processing capacities (articulation and perception) in interplay with a concrete language system, while *external factors* will cover possibilities and constraints in terms of the material and ideological aspects of social structure. The distinction itself does not imply any commitment as to where the driving force is to be found. The same can be said of William Labov's division of his monumental work on *Principles of Linguistic Change* into three volumes, subtitled *Internal Factors* (1994), *Social Factors* (2001), and *Cognitive Factors* (forthc.).

However, if I in this chapter operate with a distinction between *subjective* factors (social values and evaluations) and *objective* factors (all the others), it is not only because it gives me a cover term for "attitudes, ideology and awareness", but mainly because it reflects the theoretical position I want to advocate, namely that language change is driven by what I prefer to call "subconscious attitudes". This position is derived from our research in Denmark, which I shall return to at the end (section 3). But the main bulk of the chapter is a presentation and discussion of Labov's work – simply because this is where we find the main effort within variationism to theorize the role of subjective factors on the basis of *independent* empirical data (i.e. other data than the language use data).

2. The theoretical and empirical status of subjective factors in Labovian variationism

From the beginning of variationism, as it was developed in the work of Labov, the social unit of research was *the speech community*. This entity was defined at the level of subjective, not objective, facts about language use.

(1)

The speech community is not defined by any marked agreement in the use of language elements, so much as by participation in a set of shared norms [...] In fact, it seems plausible to define a speech community as a group of speakers who share a set of social attitudes towards language (1972: 120f., 248).

In their agenda-setting paper on the *Empirical foundations for a theory of language change*, Weinreich, Labov and Herzog (1968) listed *evaluation* among the five problems that had to be solved by the theory, namely the problems of transmission, embedding (linguistic and social), evaluation, actuation, and constraints. The first three of these in particular had been addressed empirically in Labov's research during the first half of the 1960s on Martha's Vineyard (1963) and in New York City (1966) and were thoroughly discussed in his seminal book *Sociolinguistic patterns* (1972). The evaluation problem was defined as follows:

(2)

The evaluation problem is to find the subjective (or latent) correlates of the objective (or manifest) changes which have been observed. The indirect approach to this problem correlates the general attitudes and aspirations of the informants with their linguistic behaviour. The more direct approach is to measure the unconscious subjective reactions of the informants to values of the linguistic variable itself (1972: 162).

This definition allows for three observations that relate to the issues we need to address: the independent-evidence issue (2.1), the consciousness issue (2.2), and the driving-force issue (2.3).

2.1 The "independent-evidence" issue

Labov's solution to the problem of defining the speech community was derived from the discovery that people differ far more in their use of language than in their evaluations of the different uses. It goes without saying that the collection and analysis of independent subjective data were a prerequisite for that discovery. Also, if not explicitly formulated, it clearly is an implicit statement of Labov's definition of the evaluation problem that it can not be solved on the basis of facts about language use ("the objective (or manifest) changes"); its solution requires a search for independent evidence ("the subjective (or latent) correlates"). Such evidence has been obtained and analysed in all of Labov's projects. The data are obtained in sociolinguistic interviews or group conversations and may be of two types: discursive (2.1.1), and experimental (2.1.2).

The insistence on the need for independent evidence is important, in order to avoid circular argumentation in the driving-force issue. To the extent that the subjectivities involved in language variation and change are not studied using independent data, it is hard to see how, in a principled way, we can constrain our ingenuity in pointing out ideologies that would appear as "good fits" and explanations for the established patterns of use. An example would be the different explanations that have been offered for the well-documented finding that women generally speak more "correctly" than men.

2.1.1 Discursive data

The discursive data consist of responses to, or comments about, questions that somehow relate to language. Such questions and responses may address the issue of language-related values and evaluations either directly (i), or indirectly (ii).

(i) *Evaluative responses with direct language-related relevance*

When language-related questions are posed directly, informants' answers or comments will typically draw on well-known public discourses and appear very much the same, in one and the same speech community. Labov repeatedly refers to "the fundamental sociolinguistic question posed to me in 1967 by a woman from New York: "Why do I say [wɒi] when I don't *want* to?" (2001: 215; italics in original; see also 1972: 308). He found that "New Yorkers show a general hostility towards New York City speech which emerges in countless ways. The term 'linguistic self-hatred' is not too extreme to apply to the situation which emerges from the interviews" (1966: 344). Thus, analyses of "what they say" may shed light on the significance of social values and evaluation for language use.

(ii) *Evaluative responses with indirect language-related relevance*

Answers to questions about something other than language may allow researchers to characterize and group informants according to attitudes and values that can be assumed to be language-related in an indirect way. For instance, collected utterances about life on Martha's Vineyard were used by Labov to group the informants in three categories according to whether their expressed feelings were positive, neutral, or negative towards the island. Patterns emerging from such data and analyses may be of relevance for the study of language-related values and their role in language variation and change.

2.1.2 Experimental data

A second type of evaluative interview data results from elicitations that are more or less experimental in character. These evaluations may be divided according to whether they concern the informants' own language (i), or the language of others (ii). In both respects, a further distinction is possible according to whether the evaluations concern specific variants (most often variant pronunciations of words), or whole varieties (languages or dialects). As it is the specific-variant approach that characterizes Labov's work, I focus on that approach here (and return to the "holistic" approach in section 3).

(i) *Evaluations of own language*

As developed in the classic variationist projects in New York (1966) and Norwich (Trudgill 1974), *self-evaluation tests* (also referred to as *self-report tests*) aim to tap into informants' representations (perceptions and evaluations) of their own speech and are designed to "measure" these representations in terms of some sort of comparison, with the possibility of detecting interesting "discrepancies" in the way informants relate to variant pronunciations of words.

In one design, the task of the informants is to select which one of two variant pronunciations of a word they think is correct, and then indicate which variant they usually use themselves (e.g. 'aunt' pronounced as either *ant* or *ænt*). If what an informant claims to be "correct" and their self-reported forms are not the same, the discrepancy can be made the object of interpretation; it might for instance be thought to signal a lack of confidence that one's own language is "good enough". Data from a series of such choices (eighteen in all) allowed Labov to

assign scores to his New York informants on an *index of linguistic insecurity*, and thus to characterize and compare individuals and social groups in terms of linguistic insecurity. One might argue that the discrepancy indicates a lack of confidence in one's own language, resulting from the general ideological "climate" which monitors the uses of language in the community.

(ii) *Evaluations of language spoken by others*

Around 1960, the Canadian social psychologist Wallace Lambert and his colleagues developed an experimental technique, known as the *matched guise technique*, which was designed to elicit language attitudes at the level of varieties, e.g. English and French in Quebec (Lambert et al. 1960, Lambert 1967). The idea of the approach is to collect evaluations controlling for the effects of voice quality and linguistic content. The basic procedure is to tape-record one and the same bilingual, or bidialectal, person reading the same text in the two (or more) varieties under study, and then have listeners assess the readings (the "matched guises"). In order to prevent listener-judges from realizing that the same person appears twice (or several times), the guises are separated on the tape by filler-voices. Assessments are made on some kind of evaluative scales.

In Labov's projects (1966: ch.11, 2001: section 6.3), the so-called *subjective reaction test* uses the matched guise technique in an adaptation which aims to elicit evaluation at the level of linguistic variants. The stimulus speakers appear several times on the tape, in random order, each time reading a sentence which concentrates examples of one of the variables investigated. In addition, each speaker reads a "zero sentence" with no variables of interest. The judges' evaluations of readings with a high concentration of examples of the variables investigated may then be analysed as either upgrading or downgrading in comparison with the evaluation of the zero sentence. Evaluations have been made on scales of "job suitability" and "friendliness" – which may be said to represent a more fundamental value distinction, treated by social psychologists in terms of *competence* versus *sociability*, or also *status* versus *solidarity* (Ryan, Giles & Sebastian 1982: 8). The possible relevance of such value distinctions for the theory of language change – and the role of subjective factors in change processes – seems quite obvious. Labov estimates that "[t]he most fruitful experimental measures of subjective reactions to linguistic variation have been through *matched guise tests*, [...]" (2001: 194; italics in original).

2.2 The consciousness issue

Why does the matched guise technique produce the more fruitful data? The quote above continues by qualifying the matched guise tests as tests "[...] which tap subjects' unconscious attitudes towards languages and dialects". The important word here appears to be the word *unconscious*.

We recall that Labov's definition of the evaluation problem operates with two methodological approaches to its solution (see quote 2). The "indirect approach" involves gathering data that shed light on "general attitudes and aspirations". The reference here, to judge from Labov's empirical research as outlined above, is to data from discourse and self-reporting. The more "direct approach" involves gathering of "unconscious subjective reactions", and is tantamount to matched guise testing.

In brief, the "subjective correlates" may be either conscious or unconscious. And so we may reformulate our question: why is it that *unconscious* attitudes are the more useful data? We cannot answer that question without considering the place and role of *consciousness* within Labov's theoretical framework in general (2.2.1). Having done that, we shall return to considering in what sense Labov's use of the matched guise technique taps into unconscious attitudes (2.2.2).

2.2.1 The ubiquity of un-/consciousness in Labov's framework

In fact, the notion of consciousness is of crucial importance not only when the search for “subjective correlates” is on the agenda. This holds true for Labov’s entire approach to the study of language variation and change. To start with, the consciousness dimension is (described and understood as) crucial to the phenomenon of linguistic change as such – changes are classified according to whether they come from *above* or *below* consciousness (i). Furthermore, reference to the consciousness dimension makes up the fundamental basis – for the classification of linguistic variables into *stereotypes*, *markers*, and *indicators* (ii), – for the style analyses in terms of *careful* versus *casual* speech (iii), – and, more implicitly, for the discussion of language ideology in terms of *overt* versus *covert* norms and values (iv).

(i) *Change from above and change from below*

It is a commonplace in sociolinguistics to link the distinction between change from above and change from below to the dimension of consciousness. For instance, *A Dictionary of Sociolinguistics* (Swann, Deumert, Lillis and Mesthrie 2004: 35f.) explicates the notions as follows:

(3)

change from above [...] linguistic changes of which speakers are consciously aware (the linguistic forms involved in the change are said to be ‘above’ the level of social awareness)

change from below Linguistic changes of which speakers are not consciously aware (the linguistic forms involved are said to be ‘below’ the level of social awareness)

The focus on consciousness reflects similar explications in Labov’s own writings, e.g. “change from below, that is, below the level of social awareness” (1972: 178; 2001: 279). Recently, Labov again noted about the above/below distinction that “[t]his terminology does not imply higher or lower on the socioeconomic scale” (2007: 346 footnote 2), even though we also read that ““Above” and “below” refer here simultaneously to levels of social awareness and positions in the socioeconomic hierarchy” (Labov 1994: 78).

One half of the claimed parallelism between social awareness and the socioeconomic hierarchy is easy to grasp and accept, in so far as “*Changes from above* are introduced by the dominant social class, often with full public awareness. Normally, they represent borrowings from other speech communities that have higher prestige in the view of the dominant class” (ibid: 78; italics in original). The other half of the claimed parallelism is harder to follow, partly because “[c]hanges from below may be introduced by any social class” (1994: 78), but mainly because the claims about (the absence of) consciousness in changes from below seem more problematic. I shall return to this problem in connection with the driving force issue (section 2.3), but first we need to touch on the importance of un-/consciousness to other fundamental distinctions in the Labovian framework.

(ii) *Stereotypes, markers, and indicators*

Three types of linguistic variables are differentiated, essentially in terms of social awareness, additionally in terms of patterns of use.

(4)

Some variables are the overt topics of social comment and show both correction and hypercorrection (*stereotypes*); others are not at the same high level of social awareness, but show consistent stylistic and social stratification (*markers*); still

others are never commented on or even recognized by native speakers, but are differentiated only in their relative degrees of advancement among the initiating social groups (*indicators*) (1994: 78; italics in original).

A change from below appears in the vernacular. At first, there is no social awareness of the variation, and the use of the variable by community members produces a systematic pattern only in terms of social-group membership; the variants used are *indicators* of social affiliation. As the social awareness surrounding the variable rises, the variants become *markers* of social affiliation, and the pattern of use no longer shows only systematic social-group related variation but also systematic stylistic (i.e. social-context related) variation. Whether the change comes from above or below, the variation may become the object of high level social awareness and strong evaluations, mostly in terms of negative comments concerning one of the variants; the variable has become a *stereotype*, and its use shows correctional behaviour of a more irregular kind (see e.g. 2001: 196).

(iii) *Careful* and *casual* speech

As raised social awareness is accompanied by style shifting, we are not surprised to learn that Labov's analysis of stylistic variation is founded on the notion of *attention*, i.e. a notion with clear links to *consciousness* and *awareness*.

(5)

There are a great many styles and stylistic dimensions that can be isolated by an analyst. But we find that *styles can be ranged along a single dimension, measured by the amount of attention paid to speech* (1972: 208; italics in original).

[Subjective reaction tests] must be considered as sensitive measures of the place of a given variable on a scale of social awareness. As a rule, social awareness of a given variable corresponds to the slope of style shifting (2001: 196).

In terms of social embedding, stylistic variation is analysed along a single contextual dimension. The speech situation is manipulated in the sociolinguistic interview and is characterized as more or less formal. The basic idea is that a more formal context triggers more attention to speech, which in turn triggers a more careful speech. Inversely, a less formal context triggers less attention to speech, which in turn triggers a less careful, more casual, speech. This conception of stylistic variation has been much criticised (see e.g. Milroy and Gordon 2003: 200ff.), but what we need to notice is again the decisive importance accorded to unconsciously produced (unmonitored) speech. "[T]he vernacular [is] the style in which the minimum attention is given to the monitoring of speech" (1972: 208). Monitoring yields irregular patterns of use (cf. stereotypes above), whereas the less monitored – casual, vernacular – styles yield "more systematic speech, where the fundamental relations which determine the course of linguistic evolution can be seen most clearly" (1972: 208).

(iv) *Overt* and *covert* values

Any study of 'attitudes' and 'ideology' needs to start by somehow explicating these entities in terms of social meanings, norms, or values. Ever since the New York study, Labov's basic distinction in the realm of language ideology has been between *overt* and *covert* social values. This distinction, however, has never been based, like the speech-related distinctions in (ii) and (iii) above, on explicit reference to awareness or attention.

The connection between the dimensions of social values (in terms of overt vs. covert) and consciousness (in terms of above vs. below, or conscious vs. unconscious) is clear so far as the as the “overt–conscious” connection is concerned. “The process [of ‘overt social pressures applied from above’, TK] is out in the open for us to observe, in public performances, in the attitudes of teachers in the schools, and in the conscious reactions of some middle class persons” (1966: 224). In contrast, the “covert–unconscious” connection is harder to establish with reference to explicit claims in Labov’s writings. Consider, however, the following statements:

(6)

For change from below, there is no important distinction between stigmatized and prestige forms: the speech form assumed by each group may be taken as an unconscious mark of self-identification (1966: 225f.).

(7)

There are surely other values [than the overt values, TK], at a deeper level of consciousness, which reinforce the vernacular speech forms of New York City. [...] recent studies of the black English vernacular in New York City have demonstrated the existence of such covert norms [...] (1972: 177).

By contrast with change from above, which we know to be accompanied by overt, conscious, social valuations (stigma or prestige), change from below is said in (6) to be accompanied by social valuations to do with group- and self-identification – which are *unconscious*. I take it that an alleged unconscious act of social identification will have to be classified, in terms of the overt–covert distinction, as a manifestation of *covert* values. If so, establishment of a ‘covert–unconscious’ connection appears the natural inference from quote (6). Quote (7), on the other hand, links *covert* norms or values, not to the unconscious, but to a *deeper level of consciousness*.

To judge from Labov’s work in general, no important theoretical distinction is implied by glosses like “a deeper level of consciousness” on the one hand, and “unconscious” or “below consciousness” on the other hand. To me, this is an important issue, which I shall return to. Here I just want to suggest that the “parallelisms” in the theoretical framework favour an understanding which connects “covert” with “unconscious” – the point being that Labov’s claims about the absence of consciousness in social valuations (no matter how “covert” they might be) are akin to his claims about the absence of consciousness in changes from below, and just as problematic.

2.2.2 Consciousness, values and the matched guise technique

We set out in section 2.2 to shed light on the claim that “unconscious attitudes”, obtained by using the matched guise technique, are more valuable as data for students of language change than are conscious attitudes. We have seen (in 2.2.1) that the notion of consciousness (awareness, attention) is of paramount importance to Labov’s understanding and analysis of how language in use varies and changes, and furthermore that the interesting (systematic) facts of change take place “below consciousness”, when minimal or no awareness is involved in the use of language. In brief, the priorities of the Labovian framework lie with unconscious linguistic variation and change. We can conclude that the conception of unconscious attitudes as the more valuable data type in the evaluative dimension appears natural, even mandatory, within the framework as a whole.

However, the notion of *unconscious attitudes* as used by Labov needs further clarification. We have argued above (in 2.2.1) that the parallelisms between the analytical dimensions (consciousness, class, context, and values) invite us to infer that *covert values* are

‘below consciousness’. It seems, then, that what Labov’s matched guise tests are said to be doing, as they tap into “unconscious attitudes”, is to uncover “covert values”, the social motivations from below. Accordingly, sociolinguists tend to discuss the aim and potentiality of matched guise testing in terms of attitudes that are “covert” (e.g. Fasold 1984: 164) or “private” (e.g. Garrett, Coupland and Williams 2003: 57). There is nothing surprising in this when seen against the parallelisms in Labov’s theoretical framework.

Nevertheless, there are good reasons to believe that we would be mistaken if we take *unconscious attitudes*, as obtained in Labov’s matched guise tests, to mean ‘covert values’. The main reason, of course, is that the test’s measuring instrument – the *job suitability* and *friendship* scales – simply is Labov’s operationalisation of the distinction between *overt* and *covert* values. Hence, the “unconscious attitudes” obtained in the New York project, where only a *job suitability* scale was included in the test, were never meant (nor considered) to be reflections of covert values (1966: 284; 1972: 177). In Philadelphia, the *friendship* scale was added in the hope of producing evidence for covert subjective reactions. But as the “unconscious attitudes” obtained on the *friendship* scale by and large replicated the results of the *job suitability* scale, Labov concludes by pointing to a lack of success in establishing the existence of covert values (more about this in 2.3.2 below).

In the perspective of our discussion here, it is interesting to note that Labov argues that the difficulties experienced in establishing independent evidence for covert values should be ascribed to the conditions of data collection. The argument goes something like this: In our attempts to elicit covert values, we have only come “as far as one can in a field experiment” (2001: 216), which is not very far, because covert values “do not readily emerge in formal situations” (2001: 24). – Yes, but we have seen how the contextual-formality dimension is linked to, in fact based on, the dimension of consciousness/awareness/attention; what emerges at a certain level of formality is a function of the level of consciousness involved. Thus, it seems to me that what the argument really says is something like: no evidence of covert values is found because the attitudes expressed in the matched guise experiment are “conscious”.

Indeed, “conscious attitudes” make much more sense than “unconscious attitudes”. Consider the following conditions of data collection: The Philadelphia matched guise was carried out “in course of the second interviews. [...] The “second” interview was in many cases a third, fourth, or even tenth recording made by the field workers” (2001: 207, 334). The *job suitability* question was phrased: “What is the highest job this person could hold, speaking as she does?” (2001: 207). There can be little doubt that the Philadelphia informants evaluated the matched guise speakers in full awareness of giving away attitudes towards dialect differences.

In fact, there is no indication that Labov ever aimed at obtaining conditions which might produce “unconscious attitudes” in the sense of *attitudes offered by respondents who are unaware of offering attitudes towards dialect differences* (which is what we aim at in our Danish studies; section 3 below). On the contrary, about the matched guise test in the New York project, he says that: “The respondents were told that this test was the most important part of the interview: since we had already learned how they themselves used the English language, we then wanted to know how they felt about the way other New Yorkers used it” (1966: 281f.). Respondents were actually controlled for whether they could hear dialect differences between the speakers (or sentences) on the test tape: Three respondents were described as “dialect deaf”, whereas “the great majority heard clear-cut differences between the test sentences” (ibid: 284).

What does Labov mean then by labelling his matched guise data “unconscious” (attitudes, evaluations, reactions)? As it turns out, Labov’s real reason for prioritizing the matched guise data is that these data are systematic:

(8)

The type of evaluative behavior that I would like to measure here is more systematic, more completely internalized than any reply to overt questions about speech. We are searching for the evaluative norms which reflect the complex and regular structures in [the social differentiation of language use] (1966: 280).

[...] attitudes do not emerge in a systematic form if the subject is questioned directly about dialects; but if he makes two sets of personality judgements about the same speaker using two different forms of language, *and does not realize that it is the same speaker*, his subjective evaluations of language will emerge as the differences in the two ratings (1972: 146; italics in original).

It seems clear that Labov's "unconscious attitudes" refers more to an aspect of the data-collection technique than to the nature of the data. His respondents are not unconscious of offering attitudes towards language; they are unconscious of offering attitudes towards the same speaker several times, or, in case they realize this, unable to let it influence their ratings. ("As the listener reacted to a particular sentence, he would not be able to know exactly how he had rated the same speaker in a previous utterance", 1966: 281). Thus, what Labov's matched-guise experiments collect is not "unconscious" language attitudes, but evaluative reactions towards language of a more "systematic" kind than obtained in interview answers.

2.3 The driving-force issue

Put simply, the driving-force issue (see section 1) boils down to the question of "what comes first": does change in use result from change in attitudes, or does change in attitudes result from change in use? As correlation does not imply a cause-effect relationship, stating that "the evaluation problem is to find the subjective (or latent) correlates of the objective (or manifest) changes which have been observed" (see quote (2)), does not in itself commit Labov to a particular position on the driving force issue. Actually, Labov's position on the issue has never appeared particularly clear-cut to me, but I think it is right to point out a repositioning on his part from *before Philadelphia* (2.3.1) to *after Philadelphia* (2.3.2).

2.3.1 Before Philadelphia

Independently of how we should understand the relationship between *covert values* and *unconscious attitudes* (as obtained in the matched guise test; see 2.2.2 above), it may be firmly established that Labov, throughout all of his work, operates with social values, pressures, motivations that people are unaware of.

(9)

Social forces exerted upon linguistic forms are of two distinct types, which we may call *pressures from above*, and *pressures from below*. By *below* is meant "below the level of conscious awareness". Pressures from below operate upon entire linguistic systems, in response to social motivations which are relatively obscure and yet have the greatest signification for the general evolution of language. [...] social pressures from above [...] represent the overt process of

social correction applied to individual linguistic forms (1972: 123; italics in original).

My difficulties with understanding Labov's position on the driving-force issue may largely be due to quite different conceptions of the relationship between the notions of *value* and *consciousness*. I have no problems with *changes from above*. These are driven by social evaluations that function as pressures by virtue of people's awareness of the social significance involved, often referred to in terms of *correctness* and *prestige*. The problem arises with *changes from below*. How are we to understand that social motivations and pressures with the greatest significance for language use in the speech community operate below conscious awareness (while also being relatively obscure to Labov as a student of the speech community)?

In the mechanism-of-linguistic-change paragraph that concludes Labov 1966 (398–400), it is stressed that “[...] linguistic behaviour is highly normative, or goal-directed. The need for a target, a set of norms, is evident in the casual speech of our informants as well as in their formal styles”, and it is suggested that:

(10)

Hypercorrection can operate in a more general sense [i.e. can outdo not only upper middle class norms as in the New York study, but target norms in general, TK's comment] as the mechanism of change in response to pressures from below.

[...]

Driven by the fear of not conforming, and the need to establish oneself as an authentic member of one's immediate group, the members of the speech community can gradually push these labile norms further and further in the direction that they first began to move.

[...]

the unconscious tendency of speakers to increase the measure of their identification with their immediate group may be stated as the probable mechanism of these changes.

We recall that the first stage of a change from below is characterised by absence of consciousness (see section 2.2.1 above). At this stage, the established variation functions as an *indicator*, “defined as a function of group membership” (1972: 178). That is, even though people are not aware of the change, it is thought of as driven by the kind of evaluations that delimit and define social groups. Such evaluations were also pointed out as the driving force as Labov (1972: 178ff.) summarized his experiences with the subsequent stages of “the mechanism of sound change”:

(11)

[the sound change spread] to the extent that the values of the original subgroup were adopted by other groups in the speech community [...] As the sound change with its associated values reached the limits of its expansion, the linguistic variable became one of the norms which defined the speech community, and all members of the speech community reacted in a uniform manner to its use (without necessarily being aware of it). The variable is now a *marker*, and begins to show stylistic variation.

As it develops and spreads, a linguistic variable first *indicates* social group membership, then *marks* both group and style categories. The development and spread of the variable is driven by social evaluations (attitudes come first) – which the speakers themselves are unaware of (possibly so even at the *marker* stage). As I have indicated, I am not sure how to understand this. I see two possible

readings, which to my mind entail very different theoretical assumptions and methodological implications.

The one possibility is that the notion of values (social pressures and motivations) operating from below the level of conscious awareness refers to a situation in which people *pay no conscious attention* to some of the linguistic variables which constitute their speech community, in the sense that they *do not (seem able to) comment upon* the use and social signification of the variants involved. Some of Labov's formulations point in that direction, e.g.: "To sum up, incoming linguistic changes rarely rise to the level of social comment in their initial stages, and not all changes become the focus of conscious attention even in their advanced stages" (1972: 309). "Though (aw) is not at a high level of conscious social awareness, and is rarely a subject of social comment, ..." (2001: 187). If the absence of conscious awareness (or conscious attention) results from an absence of "social comment", we may say that *below conscious awareness* means 'no available discourse', and such a reading may be taken – depending on the theoretical conceptions of "the self and its values" – to allow for the existence of an *unconscious awareness* of uses and values. There is awareness, certainly, but it is implicit, linguistically inexpressible. If this is the situation, it might be better conceived of in terms of different levels or layers of consciousness/awareness.

The other possibility is that we would be mistaken in establishing and foregrounding such a distinction between *conscious* and *unconscious awareness*, or between layers of awareness. I know of no explicit attempt in Labov's work to theorize levels of consciousness/awareness. It is true that the "either-or" treatment of this dimension (above/below, conscious/unconscious, aware/unaware) are sometimes replaced by a "more-or-less" treatment (see quote (5)). The important point to notice, however, is that *values are talked about as decisive for variation and change, quite independently of whether consciousness/awareness is said to be involved or not*. Labov seems to operate with a driving-force role for social evaluations that are conceived of as *unconscious* in the sense of being "beyond consciousness".

Apparently, Labov sees no problem here. Or rather saw no problem. In a more recent statement, which is remarkable for its explicit comment on the issue that occupies us here, Labov argues that an explanation based on social symbolism (the case in question concerns gender differentiation in use) is problematic because "it assigns social sensitivity to early stages of change that are remote from levels of social awareness" (2001: 291).

As we would expect in the work of a devoted empiricist, the continued failure to establish firm, independent evidence for the kind of social sensitivity – covert values – that was assumed to drive the more general and interesting changes in use, had to become a problem. Our discussion above suggests two possible approaches to the lack-of-evidence problem. On the one hand, if the distinction between *conscious* and *unconscious*, between *overt* and *covert*, is a question of layers of consciousness and discursive availability, the natural implication for the student of language change would be to concentrate on developing methods for tapping into the deeper layers that people lack a language to express. On the other hand, if we operate with a binary 'either-or' conception and end up with no evidence for covert values in spite of supposedly valid and reliable endeavours to establish such evidence, the result might be an instigation to rethink the driving-force issue. As we shall see, it is probably right to say that Labov has opted for the latter approach.

2.3.2 After Philadelphia

The matched guise test of the Philadelphia project was designed to detect indications of covert values in terms of a reversed response pattern for *friendliness* in comparison with *job suitability* (see 2.1.2(ii) above). The result was, however, that "[n]o such tendency emerged. In general, the friendship question replicated the results of the job suitability question. [...] evidence for covert

norms failed to appear” (2001: 216f.). Arguably as a consequence of the fact that “Philadelphians have shown a strong pattern of negative evaluation of changes in progress, and no clear evidence of covert, positive evaluation of their own behaviour” (2001: 220), a growing tendency to reduce or even refute the driving-force role attributed to subjective factors is clearly discernible in Labov’s more recent work.

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[...] *Changes from below* are systematic changes that appear first in the vernacular, and represent the operation of internal, linguistic factors. At the outset, and through most of their development, they are completely below the level of social awareness. No one notices them or talks about them, and even phonetically trained observers may be unconscious of them for many years. It is only when the changes are nearing completion that members of the community become aware of them (1994: 78; italics in original).

This description recapitulates earlier formulations as far as the role of consciousness/awareness is concerned, but *there is no mention of values*. Changes from below are not assumed to be driven by social valuations (pressures and motivations) in the same way as before (as in quote 9), but are instead said to “represent the operation of internal, linguistic factors”.

The importance of solving the evaluation problem by searching for the subjective correlates, including the covert values in particular, is now clearly downplayed in Labov’s approach and argumentation, while the pertinence of ‘interactional frequency’ to the driving-force issue is upgraded in the discussion – with reference to Bloomfield’s *principle of density*, the implications of which with regard to the evaluation problem is spelled out: “The principle of density implicitly asserts that we do not have to search for a motivating force behind the diffusion of linguistic change. The effect is a mechanical and inevitable one; the implicit assumption is that social evaluation and attitudes play a minor role” (2001: 20).

In discussing other researchers’ claims about the role of attitudes in terms of ‘group membership’ or ‘acts of identity’ (exemplified with Sturtevant 1947, and Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985), Labov argues that “[i]f such attitudes are to be used to account for linguistic diffusion, it is necessary to posit a covert belief structure”, and goes on to cautiously admit that “such covert attitudes and beliefs may actually be involved in linguistic change”, but stresses that “they are not usually supported by material evidence” (2001: 191). Even the few cases where attitudinal evidence for an effect from ‘local-identification’ processes on sound change in progress have been considered fairly secure (as in the Martha’s Vineyard study), are reopened for a possible interpretation in line with the density principle: “The question remains as to whether the same conclusions could be drawn from frequencies of interaction with speakers with different systems, following Bloomfield’s principle of density. In other words, language change may simply reflect changes in interlocutor frequencies which are in turn the result of changes in social preferences and attitudes” (ibid: 191). In another version of his argument with the acts-of-identity position, Labov finds the group-distinguishing function of linguistic differences to be “very likely”, but, because of the lack of independent evidence for covert values, “there is always the possibility that the effect is due to Bloomfield’s principle of density: that the more often people talk to each other, the more similar their speech will be” (ibid: 228). The consequences for the research strategy in general, and the possible consequences for the status of the evaluation problem in particular, are radical:

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The strategy of this inquiry [into whether language change is driven by changes in either ‘interactional frequency’ or ‘social identifications’] is to draw as much as possible on

concrete evidence of actual behaviour as evidence for such questions. To the extent that social differences in language behaviour can be mapped onto the matrix of communicative interaction, we must give priority to this pattern of interaction in accounting for the linguistic facts. [...] The account based on covert attitudes is redundant to the extent that the network of daily interaction brings people into contact with the new form in proportion to their distance from the originating group (2001: 191–2).

Thus, the Philadelphia study puts focus on the communicative interaction of individual people in their social networks, and “transform[s] the traditional question “Why does language change?” into a different form: “Who are the leaders of linguistic change?” (2001: 29). The characteristics of these leaders are determined by studying “their personal statements, their social histories, and their philosophies of life” (2001: 33). The study concludes that “[t]he history of our leaders of linguistic change is a history of nonconformity, and their sociolinguistic position is a display of nonconformity” (2001: 410). Celeste S. is presented as the prototypical influential person: “She did not hesitate to use violence when it was called for. But her primary weapons were linguistic: negotiation, persuasion, and denunciation, all enlisted under a profound intolerance for cupidity, hypocrisy, and injustice. These are the qualities that make a great leader of linguistic change” (2001: 410). The Nonconformity Principle, presented as the major conclusion of the 2001 volume, says that: “Ongoing linguistic changes are emblematic of nonconformity to established social norms of appropriate behaviour, [...] are generated in the social milieu that most consistently defies these norms, [and] are generalized to the wider community by those who display the symbols of nonconformity in a larger pattern of upward mobility” (2001: 516).

One might argue here that the qualities given as characteristic of the leaders of change might just as well be referred to as values, and furthermore that the Nonconformity Principle might perfectly well be read as a statement to the effect that covert values are the driving-force of change. Such a reading would be tantamount to saying that the neighbourhood-based Philadelphia study indeed offers a partly new methodological approach to the task of establishing independent evidence for covert values.

Labov, however, reasons otherwise. The leaders of change are “people taking deliberate and conscious actions that identify their social position and define their relations with the community”, but...

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[t]heir linguistic choices cannot be described as actions in the same sense. The level or rate of use of a stochastic variable is at the level of consciousness comparable to walking and breathing. There is no evidence that attitudes, ideologies, and opinions that people express in so many words will bear directly upon linguistic changes from below. These attitudes may influence who a person talks to and how often they talk, and so affect the flow of linguistic influence and the diffusion of sound changes within and across local social networks (2001: 409).

Labov does in fact say that the notion of nonconformity “deals with norms that are covert in some situations, but emerge more freely in others” (2001: 512). However, his theoretical point is that there is no evidence of direct influence from such norms on linguistic changes from below. Whatever their mode of existence or appearance might be, attitudes, ideologies and opinions may influence patterns of interaction, but the change-producing forces at work in interaction are “internal, linguistic factors” – factors of a mechanical kind which should be compared to the forces behind walking and breathing rather than social identifications and evaluations.

Labov's position now seems to be that a driving-force role for social values becomes a pertinent issue only if changes can not be accounted for in terms of 'mechanical' or 'structural' forces (see e.g. 2001: 463, 500). In discussing the acts-of-identity type of explanation, Labov explicitly refutes a more constructivist view in stressing that he does not see the leaders of change (like Celeste S.) "as creating a system of verbal behaviour so much as responding to ambient pressures to shift their habitual range of values of Philadelphia variables", and stresses that "[a]s always, it is good practice to consider first the simpler and more mechanical view that social structure affects linguistic output through changes in the frequency of interaction" (2001: 505f.).

The continued reduction of a role for social evaluations in language change reaches its end point in the recent article on *Transmission and diffusion* (Labov 2007), in which these two change processes are explained in terms of different learning strategies in children and adults, without any reference to norms or values at all.

3. The driving-force role of covert attitudes: the Danish evidence

Are subjective factors to be seen as essential to language change processes – i.e. as their driving force – or as a contingent concomitant of use differences that emerge in virtue of other, objective factors? This issue became central to Danish sociolinguistics from its very beginning in the 1970s, as it began where Labov seems to have ended.

When Brink & Lund argue and, to some extent, document that Copenhagen speech (including its HIGH/LOW variation) is spreading to the rest of Denmark, they rely on the density principle as their main explanation, presented in a textbook for university students (Brink & Lund 1974) as the "Napoleon principle": always make sure you outnumber the enemy where you attack him. In other words, wherever variants compete, the victory will go to the most frequently heard variant. Brink & Lund admit that prestige may influence the battle and speed up the advance of the new variant, but in general they treat, and condemn, attribution of social values to linguistic variants as a category mistake, in speakers and researchers alike.

The view that attitudes are alien to language use and change (and should be fought and eliminated as mistakes) appeared to be in accordance with the facts of the Danish speech community as it developed between 1960 and 1980. The traditional dialects stopped being transferred to, or acquired by, the rising generations, and were replaced by Copenhagen speech which spread to the whole country, most vitally in its LOW variety among young people. In contrast, Danish elite discourse (as represented for instance in official teaching guidelines) began extolling the value of local dialects, while increasing the complaints (e.g., through letters to the editor) about particular features of LOW Copenhagen speech as these became increasingly salient on national television. So, what happened at the level of use was the opposite of what happened at the level of attitudes. Language ideology did indeed seem to be of little relevance to attempts at explaining language change.

This picture has been strongly supported by the many empirical studies of language attitudes that have been conducted in Denmark from the beginning of the 1980s on: *outside of Copenhagen, young people are always, on average, found to express more positive attitudes towards LOCAL varieties of language than towards LOW Copenhagen speech*. This holds true whether the data are of a discursive or an experimental kind (see section 2.1) – also subjective reaction tests confirm this picture – *but with the proviso that the elicited attitudes are consciously offered*.

The ideological climate surrounding Danish varieties appears quite different whenever the subjective reaction test is constructed and conducted in such a way that *subjects do not become*

aware of reacting to language varieties (see the discussion in 2.2.2). In this case, we talk of the obtained data as *subconscious attitudes*. Or the point is rather that the attitudes are *subconsciously offered* in the test situation. Besides exploiting natural situations, which is difficult (for an example, see Kristiansen 1998), we have succeeded in collecting subconscious attitudes in experimental situations (class room settings) from around one thousand young Danes over a period of twenty years. The same basic design has been used in more than ten Danish localities, including all parts of the country and a wide range of community types. As our claims to a decisive role for covert values in language change are based on the results from these experiments, I shall go into some detail with the design (as it materialized in the LANCHART project; for further descriptions, see Kristiansen *forthc.* a, and b).

Having been based on the so-called verbal guise technique, the experiments in question have requested 9th graders (15–16 years old, in their last year of compulsory schooling and representing the whole social gamut) to evaluate clips of about 30 seconds taken from different speakers talking about the same subject: “What is a good teacher?”. As this design represents a relaxation of the control for voice and content effects obtained in a matched-guise design, we have used four speakers for each of the accents under study in each community, and have said that conclusions as to a decisive effect of accent differences on evaluations are acceptable if, and only if, the assumed accents emerge as clear similarities and differences in how the speakers are evaluated. This has always turned out to be the case: the accents we have assumed to be relevant in processes of social identifications among today’s adolescents (two in Copenhagen, three in all other communities) have always emerged from the evaluative patterns. As the high/low social contrast seems to have lost much of its significance at the levels of both use and attitudes in later decades, we label the three accents MODERN (characterized by previous “low” features and recently developed “new” features), CONSERVATIVE (with no or fewer “low” and “new” features), and LOCAL (i.e. Copenhagen speech with traces of local prosody). The stimulus speakers are adolescents of the same age as the subjects. The same four MODERN and four CONSERVATIVE speakers have been used in all communities (all of them are Copenhageners), while the four LOCAL speakers, it goes without saying, have been recorded in each of the local communities under study.

Three methodological points have been essential to the successful elicitation of subconsciously offered attitudes. Firstly, no information has been given to the informants prior to their participation about the purpose of the experiment, and the data collection has followed a strict procedure in order to avoid questions and comments that might arouse informants’ awareness of the purpose. Secondly, the accentual variation represented in the stimulus tape has been “natural” – i.e. a part of everyday speech in the local community under study and therefore not salient in any way that might make the informants reflect on the purpose of the evaluation as having to do with dialectal differences. Thus, the stimulus speakers represented the three accents that are naturally present as young speech in any Danish locality today. Thirdly, the measurement instrument – i.e. the scales used for evaluations – has been constructed in such a way that informants’ attention was not directed to the idea that the evaluations were towards dialect. Thus, evaluative items focusing on speech (correct? good? dialect?) had to be left out, of course, in favour of items addressing speaker characteristics, e.g. in terms of personality traits (intelligent? trustworthy? cool?).

After completion, informants have always been asked what they thought the experiment was about. No one has ever suggested anything that could be taken to mean attitudes towards “dialects”. When they are told, and listen to the speakers again, informants are always amazed how easy it is to hear, now that they know, that the speakers have different accents – which is informative on the nature of our “subconscious attitudes”: if ‘naturally occurring’ accent differences are that easily made recognizable, they are likely to be included in listeners’ reactions also when they are not salient in the evaluative situation. In this sense, I find it evident that people

will always have to be aware of the value issues involved in the use of language, if values have a role to play in the battle between variants. These values are *covert* in the sense that they differ radically from the *overt* attitudes expressed in general (common as well as elite) public discourse.

Now, the point is that the *covert* evaluations – in sharp contrast with the *overt* ideology of Danish society – show a pattern which is not in contradiction, but in accordance, with what happens at the level of use. In comparison with “pure” Copenhagen speech (whether in CONSERVATIVE or MODERN version), young Danes everywhere strongly downgrade the “locally coloured” speech (LOCAL) – which in most cases is their own speech. As to the variation within Copenhagen speech, the evaluative pattern is again consistently the same all over the country, including the city of Copenhagen itself: MODERN is everywhere strongly upgraded on *dynamism* traits (such as self-assured, fascinating, cool), whereas CONSERVATIVE does as well or better on *superiority* traits (such as intelligent, conscientious, trustworthy).

Thus, subconsciously offered attitudes show no trace of positive values attached to locally coloured speech; there is no trace of the often found distinction between *status* values accorded to standard varieties and *solidarity* values accorded to non-standard varieties. In terms of covert values – i.e. at the subconscious level of social evaluation – the battle for the position as “best language” in late-modern Danish society includes only Copenhagen speech and is a matter of *dynamism* versus *superiority*.

This evaluative pattern is reproduced in a remarkably uniform and consistent fashion by young people across all of Denmark. At least as far as the younger people are concerned, Denmark is a *speech community* in the Labovian sense, not only by virtue of shared *overt* values, but also, and in particular, in virtue of shared *covert* values.

One might accept, I guess, that our studies have established firm evidence for covert values, and at the same time refuse to accept that we have proven a driving-force role for these values in the changes of language use. We have established “subjective correlates” – subconsciously offered – that are in accordance and not in contradiction with the changes in use, but can we say for sure what comes first to the young community: the advance of Copenhagen speech, or its evaluative upgrading? Can we decide for sure whether the essential factor in change (the driving force) is to be found in the facts of use (the density of interaction) or in the facts of ideology (the noncognitive functions, i.e. the connotational meanings, of variation)? Maybe not.

It seems to me, however, that the spread of Copenhagen speech is far easier to understand as an effect of the covert values we have established than as an effect of the density principle. The limited size of Denmark notwithstanding, I find it hard to see how the “Napoleon strategy” (always make sure you outnumber the enemy where you attack him) could possibly bring Copenhagen speech to all corners of the country. I find it more natural to reason like Labov did on Martha’s Vineyard when he found that the facts of use (centralization of the diphthongs /ay/ and /aw/) was more sharply stratified by the facts of ideology (orientation towards the island) than by any other background factor: “[this] indicates that we have come reasonably close to a valid explanation” (1972: 39), or stated even stronger: “It seems plain that the noncognitive functions which are carried by these phonological elements are the essential factors in the mechanism of the change. This conclusion can be generalized to many other instances of more complex changes [...]” (1972: 170).

As to the development of the nationwide uniformity of covert representations (perceptions and evaluations), it can only be understood as an effect of identical experiences with language varieties in the national public sphere. The general upgrading of Copenhagen speech and downgrading of local speech reflect how these two types of language are treated by the most important institutions in young people’s public life: Copenhagen speech is the only “appropriate” language in the schools and the spoken media, local speech is “not good enough”. Also the split

between MODERN and CONSERVATIVE Copenhagen speech, and their battle for “best language” position in terms of *dynamism* versus *superiority*, is likely to be a reflection of what young people experience as ‘excellence’ in language in the modern media on the one hand, and the more traditional institutions of education and business on the other hand (Kristiansen 2001).¹

4. Concluding remarks

Most sociolinguists, I guess, will judge social values and evaluations to be of relevance to the study of language use in very many of its aspects, maybe even in all of its aspects. We are quite a few who feel that we learned this from Labov, and therefore find reasons to ponder when Labov begins the *Social Factors* volume by stressing the narrowness of the interface between language and society. Having pointed out that “[a]t one point in the development of sociolinguistics, it was not uncommon for scholars to suggest that the social and linguistic aspects of language were coextensive in the sense that each linguistic element had a social aspect or evaluation”, Labov continues: “Yet the actual situation seems to be quite the reverse. For the most part, linguistic structure and social structure are isolated domains, which do not bear upon each other. [...] The force of social evaluation, positive or negative, is generally brought to bear only upon superficial aspects of language: the lexicon and phonetics” (2001: 28).

On the face of it, this just reiterates what Labov has always said, namely that “[i]n speaking of the role of social factors influencing linguistic evolution, it is important not to overestimate the amount of contact or overlap between social values and the structure of language” (1972: 251). In reality, however, the significance of this claim about the relationship between social values and language is different ‘after Philadelphia’ from what it was ‘before Philadelphia’, because of the general change in theoretical perspective. The claim now reads, and serves, as an argument for omitting the evaluation problem from the privileged position it once was accorded among the theoretical and methodological problems that has to be solved by the theory of language change.

In my reading, Labov’s own failure to establish firm independent evidence for covert values appears the decisive reason why he changes position on the driving-force role of social values. However, one might suggest that this change has been radicalized as a reaction to how social-value explanations have proliferated, in terms of “identity” and “prestige”, mostly without any other evidence than the patterns of use themselves: “It is not uncommon to speak of linguistic changes as the result of speakers’ desires to assume a certain social identity. But for most linguistic changes from below, operating well below the level of social awareness, the only evidence for such acts of identity is simply the fact that successive generations change their ways of speaking (2001: xv). “In recent years, a great deal of attention has been given to the association of linguistic variables with local identity [...]. As with the covert values [...], the evidence for the association of such values is largely the linguistic distributions themselves” (2001: 228).

It is interesting to note that also that other important scholar in Labovian sociolinguistics, Peter Trudgill, in recent years has addressed the driving-force issue by stressing the role of mechanistic factors at the expense of social evaluations, while expressing similar

¹ We hope to be able to shed further light on the driving-force issue in future studies within the LANCHART project (www.lanchart.dk); the design of such a study is outlined in Kristiansen and Jørgensen 2005; for fuller descriptions of the Danish speech community, see Kristiansen and Jørgensen eds. 2003, Gregersen ed. forthcoming.).

reservations with regard to the omnipresence of identity as an explanatory notion (Trudgill 2004; see the discussion in *Language in Society* 37/2, 2008).

The issue of whether and how different aspects of language may be differently available to awareness and/or social evaluation is certainly of importance to our understanding of language variation and change, but a discussion of this issue has not been my aim in this chapter (for such discussions, see Labov 2001: 25–28; Preston 1996, forthcoming; discussions of ‘salience’ as a central notion in this regard may be found in Trudgill 1986, Auer et al. 1998, Kerswill and Williams 2002). My aim has been of a more foundational kind: while wholly sharing the scepticism towards social-identity explanations which are inferred solely from patterns of use, my intention has been to defend the driving-force view of social values which Labov and Trudgill seem to have abandoned, and hence to defend a privileged position for the evaluation problem in the study of language change – in accordance with Labov’s first assumptions and guidelines, which I find fundamentally sound: (i) the role of ideology should be studied and established using independent evidence, i.e. in data other than the established patterns of use; (ii) the study of ideological data should focus on social motivations ‘from below’ in particular, because (iii) these motivations, appearing in subconsciously offered attitudes as covert values, are important to language change in a way that overt values are not. These fundamentals of the original Labovian framework are sustained by the Danish evidence. My moral goes as follows: the failure to establish independent evidence for covert values should stimulate us, as students of language change, to develop our methods (allowing for elicitations of subconsciously offered attitudes) rather than lead us to abandon the driving-force view of social evaluation.

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